## CHAPTER III.

## RANK.

Chieftainship —— a sack society ——— the potlatch.
CHIEFTAINSHIP

In the previous chapter we have been described the beliefs of the Bella Coola with regard to the origin of names, and the pride with which they regard those names that are embodied in their ancestral myths, and carry with them prized prerogatives. But the unsystematic method by which ancestral names are inherited is sufficient to show that their possession, though valued for sentimental reasons, is not enough to make the owner of such a name a chief. On what, then, is Bella Coola chieftainship based? Expressed briefly, this depends on the number and value of presents distributed at any kind of ceremonial. To the Bella Coola, every rite, whether it be a marriage, the bestowal of a name, a dance, a funeral, or admission into a secret society, is intimately associated with the myth by which the performance is authorized. Accordingly, the host is really displaying the glories of his ancestors before the eyes of his guests. And to the Bella Coola it is unthinkable for such to be done without giving presents to all, failure to do so would destroy the value of the prerogative. This chapter deals principally with the potlatch, the ceremonial at which the most lavish presents are given, but the principle of the acquisition of prestige by the giving of presents is the same for all other rites; the only difference is that at a potlatch a man is able to display his generosity to a larger number of recipients. In consequence, the aim of every ambitious man is to hold potlatches, and his status in the community virtually rests on his ability in this respect. The ritual of a potlatch will be described in detail in the latter part of this chapter, but its complicated ritual will only be intelligible after a description of the broader principles of chieftainship. It is clear that the first essential is to consider presents.

Presents. Presents.

Further concrete examples may help to clarify this point. A few years ago a number of Kwakiutl Indians visited Bella Coola for the purpose of performing a mourning ceremony in honor of a Bella Coola deceased who had a Kwakiutl name from his grandfather, a member of that tribe. All the Bella Coola were invited to a large house where the visitors gave a dance according to their own ancestral myths, and the songs used recounted the history of the Kwakiutl name of the deceased Bella Coola. After thus displaying themselves their prerogatives, the visitors felt obliged, and proud, to give presents as validation. The sum of $546.00 was distributed among the Bella Coola. Realizing that it would be impossible to return such a sum by holding ceremonials in Fort Rupert, the home of the Kwakiutl, the leading Bella Coola decided to return the compliment immediately. The amount to be given was discussed at great length. The Bella Coola, appreciating the courtesy of their guests in thus coming to pay honor to a deceased Bella Coola, did not wish to insult them by giving a larger present which would have had the effect of intimating that the recipients considered the $546.00 a trifling amount. Accordingly it was finally agreed to give the visitors a sum of about $300.00, which was done as validation of a Bella Coola ceremony at which the visitors were present. Thus the Bella Coola allowed themselves to be shamed as a mark of courtesy. Not to be outdone in politeness, the Kwakiutl chief made a speech, expressing his willingness to allow the Bella Coola to drive him (this occurred in the days of horses and carts) to the wharf to take the steamer. In other words, he allowed the Bella Coola to put him in their debt, as they had allowed him and his party to do with respect to the distribution of money. The visit terminated with friendly relations maintained on both sides.

The following is an instance of the need to validate every ceremonial act by presents. When the writer was in Bella Coola, a non-ceremonial entertainment was given one evening at which several Indians sang and performed. The writer was asked to sing a Bella Coola song which he did in the belief that it was not one that was incorporated in the ancestral myth of anyone. Unfortunately, his teacher erred, and as soon as the song was completed an old woman arose and stated that it was a song which belonged to her ancestral family. She avoided the difficulty of its singing

by immediately announcing that the singer was her "son". Thus the writer was adopted into a Bella Coola family, a circumstance which aided him considerably in collecting information. But this did not alter the fact that a ceremonial song had been sung. Accordingly, she gave presents to the guests, thereby demonstrating the legality of the singing, and saving herself from the disgrace of having one of her songs sung as if it were a matter of no consequence, free to anyone.

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Seating.

Leaving now the abstract concepts of presents as means of validating ritual acts and acquiring prestige, we pass to concrete examples of their use. As described in the previous chapter, every Bella Coola has at least one name embodied in an ancient myth. A man who wishes to become a chief can only do so by the giving of lavish presents to make his name "strong", "firm", or "bright", to use Bella Coola expressions. Such gifts not only intangibly increase the importance of the owner's name, but they also win for him a seat, more or less definitely located, in the house. Since all Bella Coola houses are built on similar ancestral lines, a man can occupy his wonted seat when summoned to a ceremony in any house. The validating of names and the acquisition of seats are features which occur at potlatches, two reasons for the importance of this ceremony. The ritual of establishment will be described in the last section of this chapter.

several potlatches be given, with distribution of goods for this purpose, it becomes recognized that the son shall take his father's seat. None the less, he will not have his father's influence or prestige unless he can himself continue to give away goods, because it is on this that the power of a chief rests, and not on his ancient name or the location of his seat.

Further evidence of the fact that a man's influence rests less on his actual name than on the wealth distributed with reference to it, is found in the wide difference of opinion regarding what names it is best to use. Those of highest potential importance are the names brought to this earth by the first comers, yet frequently a man prefers to elevate his position with respect to a name of later origin. It is not uncommon for a man to validate several ancestral names, and choose one of them to be his most important by valuable gifts for the seat which he occupies with respect to it. And frequently the name selected is one of modern origin rather than one which came to earth with the first people. Thus, a certain Bella Coola chief who is the legal owner of the names Qeit and Xemlaix, two of the first people to settle this earth, has based his greatness on the goods expended for a seat with reference to the name Sialxelax, of more modern origin. It is accordingly clear that a Bella Coola can rise to a position of great importance, even though he lacks the right to one of the most ancient names.

Moreover, a powerful chief can create a name. In this case the "power" of the name rests, not in any supernatural owigin, but in the actual wealth distributed, in itself an affair of great importance. Two examples will serve to illustrate this point. About forty years ago when my informant's uncle was preparing to give a potlatch at which his nephew was to be given a name, fire destroyed the village with the exception of his uncle's house. This added to the actual value of the food and goods distributed, since it was winter and the people were in dire straits for food on account of the destruction of all stores. In consequence my informant's uncle decided to amke a new name for his nephew, Skaml, "Charred Wood." By virtue of the goods expended, this name became an honourable title, and was maintained as such by lavish presents. Any similar peculiarity connected with a potlatch can be made the origin of a name. Another type of manufactured name is derived from some peculiarity of the man giving the potlatch, usually an obscene allusion. Thus one

chief was jeered at by his associates on account of the frequency with which he used a privy. When next he gave a potlatch he created the name Apst l s, "The Privy One", and gave great dignity to this name by presents.

Since a seat is only valuable owing to the goods expended in obtaining it with respect to a certain name, it is clear that names and seats are closely associated. A young man whose father has shown that he wishes his son to succeed to his own location in the house sist, as has been described, at his father's feet. It may be a matter of years before he actually takes his father's position, but during that time he is treated with respect; he is still a commoner but it is recognized that his parent considers him likely to "make good" and become a true chief by ability to give presents. Should he fail to do so, inexorably his influence wanes, in spite of his name and duly validated seat. He keeps the latter, but it is no longer considered one of importance. Thus, too, the course of names from generation to generation is a series of curved; sometimes one is on a pinnacle of glory when"made strong"by a powerful chief, but in the next generation it may have fallen to the dust when owned by a feeble chief. As the Bella Coola express it:— it has become hermaphroditized.

A woman is rarely established in a seat, and usually only when a chief has no sons or other near male descendants. In such a case she received an ancestral name and has the same status as a man chief. When the writer was in Bella Coola one important chief had thus obtained a seat for his daughter, as well as ones for his two sons. But usually a woman continues to use an ancestral name given to her in infancy until she is able to assist her husband in a potlatch when a name is created for her. This subject is described in Chapter VI. The ancestral names of the first women to occupy this earth are reserved for women, but most names given to children, though embodied in origin myths, are applicable to either sex. Cases are known in which a woman has assumed an ancestral name if her brother has allowed this to fall into ill-reput through his failure to give potlatches.

Considering the fluidity of the system, it is clear that no fixed line can be drawn separating a chief from one who is still a commoner. But when a man has given his fourth potlatch his influence in the community has become great and he will

Power of Chiefs.

It will be seen from the foregoing that chiefatianship among the Bella Coola does not depend on hereditary rank, still less on an elective principle, but on the individual's prestige as displayed, especially, in his ability to acquire for himself a firm seat by the giving away of presents. As he continues to do so his influence becomes ever greater. Consequently, it is impossible to state clearly what are the powers of a chief; such depend upon his prestige and influence. For a Bella Coola chief has no executive ~~authority~~ or judicial authority, what deference is shown to him depends on his ~~ability~~ success as a man, a factor which is constantly rising or falling.

This is especially noticeable, of course, among the members of a chief's own family. A few years ago, for example, when a certain Bella Coola died, his brother wished a kusiut name-prerogative of the deceased to pass to the latter's daughter. The girl's mother's father, a numit! chief, objected, and his desires were followed although the name in question was not one connected in any way with his family. In small matters, too, people are only too glad to carry out the wishes of a chief. If work is required around the house the chief can order it to be done, and no one would think of disobedience. The writer once asked an old Indian whether, when he was a young man, chiefs gave many orders and generally acted as masters in their households.

"You bet", the old man answered emphatically with a dry chuckle.

At the present time it is difficult to form an accurate es-

timate from observation of the influence of x chiefs solely through virtue of the goods they have expended. Accordingly the following instance id valuable. In November 1923 when the writer was walking through the Bella Coola village one day, he was bitten by a dog. Somewhat annoyed, he inquired to whom the animal belonged, and was told that it was the property of a certain old woman, and, moreover, that it was a bad dog since it bit people. With this statement the writer agreed heartily. When next he saw the owner he asked her whether she knew that her dog was bit people.

"Yes," she answered, in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, "He is a chief and can do what he likes."

Further questioning elicited the information that the old woman and her husband, the childless last survivors of an ancestral family, had transmitted some of their ancestral names to their dog, and had distributed presents to validate the bestowal. Consequently, their dog is a chief and can do as he likes. When the animal dies he will be mourned as a chief. Moreover, a number of people have returned the presents which they received at the time the dog was made a chief, and this money is kept by the woman and her husband; it will be used when they perform the rite of mouring for the dog at death.

When this is possible, even in the present degenerate days, it is not difficult to understand how, in former days, a great chief felt himself above the restraints that hindered lesser men. The last great Bella Coola chief was Potl s, who died about fifty years ago. His influence and power were so great that he was a virtual ruler, daring anything. If he requested a young man to take his food box home and the youth was slow in obeying, Potl s had no hesitation in murdering him on the spot. Such great power, though unusual, is intelligible to the Bella Coola since Potl s gave far more potlatches than any of his contemporaries. Other chiefs have been known to attempt a similar arbitrary use of power, but failed, since their prestige was not great enough to carry them through. The fame of such a mighty chief spreads up and down the coast, and so highly is he respected, that neither himself nor any member of his family will be slain in one of the ambushed which used to be of common occurrence. Conditions during an actual fight were different, and then a chief had to take his chances with the rest, but the comaparative immunity was a great ad-

vantage.

The Bella Coola recognise the fundamental differences between their own concepts with regard to chieftainship and those of other coastal tribes with whom they have come in contact. This point was mentioned in the course of conversation by several informants. The most powerful chief known to the Bella Coola was Tc b sa, who, they say, was virtual monarch of the Kitkatla. None of his subjects could go hunting without his permission, and he had rights to a certain share of their booty. At any ceremony presents had first to be given to him, and if he were slighted in this respect, he at once killed the offender. The Bella Coola believe that all the Kitkatla chiefs were powerful, but Tc b sa ~~xxxx~~ was the greatest of all. It is said that one of his prerogatives was to exercise the jus primae noctis whenever a Kitkatla was married. Without question, tales of this chief's prowess have become exaggerated in transmission, none the less it is clear that the Bella Coola realised the great importance of the northern chiefs. Concerning their nearer neighbours, the Bella Bella, the Bella Coola understand the way in which a chief is helped by his relatives ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ with presents. And they say that the Bella Bella consider the Bella Coola practice of each one endeavouring to make himself a chief to be foolish in the extreme. Such is also said to be the opinion among the Kwakiutl, who support their contention that in Bella Coola all are chiefs from the fact that flooring exists under the seats of all, whereas in Fort Rupert, their home, such is only found beneath the seats of chiefs.

Corresponding to the extreme paucity of functions of chiefs, as such, so are their prerogatives scanty. Indeed, they only take their validated seats during certain rites of the secret society connected with chiefs (1), and at potlatches and at ceremonial meals. These last occur whenever a deer or seal is killed; the latter is considered a great delicacy.(2) Anyone can kill a seal, but it would be unthinkable for a Bella Coola to share its flesh only with his immediate family. The animal is cleaned, the hole made

(1). See the next section of this chapter.
(2). Only traces of the rite described in this paragraph occur at the present time. In fact, the reservation of a seal meat for chiefs alone was discontinued about forty years ago.

Parts

~~Bring in potlatch incorporates origin myth, elided from presents.~~

by bullet or spear carefully plugged, and the carcass boled whole in a large box. Meanwhile a herald (1) summons the chiefs to the house where the successful hunter lives. If the meal is to consist only of one small seal, only a few chiefs are invited, those favoured being the ones of greatest influence through their possession of "strong" seats. When several seals have been killed, the number invited is correspondingly greater, but no woman may ever partake, unless she ranks as a man by the duly validated ownership of a chief's name in her own right. Formerly- no slave was ever allowed to eat seal, unless he had actually been the slayer of it. The chiefs seated themselves according to their proper positions and were first served with the blood stained grease that floated to the top of the water as the animal was boiling. When cooked, it was cut into longitudinal strips, measured in terms of so many fingerbreadths, according to the number of guests. The cuts run down each fore-flipper, so that each receives a narrow strip including one of the toes. The head is always given to the herald. (2). If a large number of seals are killed, chiefs from adjacent villages are sometimes invited.

Wealthy chiefs frequently invite their fellows to meals even when no seal or deer has been killed, and when, accordingly, the food is nothing unusual. On these occasions, as on seal feats, the guests are called by the ancestral names, and not by those in general use.

Chiefs are also accustomed to meet for the discussion of matters connected with the winterceremonial (3); on such occasions their ranks may be augmented by men of influence in the secret society, though they do not possess rank as chiefs. Such a meeting is always called when a new member is to be initiated into the kusiut society. If there is difference of opinion as to the desirability of the step the influence of eben a numiti chief is outweighed by a man of importance in the kusiut society. The matter is discussed by all present and concensus of opinion reached by general agree-

(1). See page .
(2). Every effort was made to insure the accuracy of this account, but errors may have crept in on account of the length of time which has elapse since the ceremony was carried out in full detail.

(3). See page .

ment. It is difficult for a white man to understand how such is possible without either a vote, or ~~the~~ general recognition by all that the views of some individual must be accepted. The writer was present at one such meeting, and was struck by the manner in which, after ~~x~~ considerable, and at times heated, discussion, a concensus of opinion was reached, and accepted even by those who had proposed a contrary course.

Near every village there is a place where the chiefs hold such meetings. All the inhabitants know the general locality, but they are so impressed with the supernatural dread of the powers possessed by members of the ~~xxxxxxx~~ kusiut society that none would dare go there. If an uninitiated person should do so, he would ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ formerly have been killed or initiated into the ranks of the kusiut. The meeting-place of the Qomqo ts chiefs is on a ledge on rock jutting out over a waterfall about a quarter of a mile from the village. The stream winds down a narrow cleft of the mountain side, screened by dense vegetation, and suddenly falls into a cauldron, so hemmed in by precipitous cliffs that no sunlight can enter. The ledge is immediately above the brink of the falls, one of the most awe-inspiring places even seen by the writer. The meeting-places of other villages lack such natural ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ features, though all are at the bases of cliffs, or near some easily distinguished feature. Some of them are decorated with rude carvings, pecked into the stone. The meaning of the designs are not known by any of the present inhabitants. Some of them were made, long ago, by chiefs when they were composing tunes, and who picked out the rock in time to the music formulating ~~xxxx~~in their minds. Others were mere memorials of ceryain events. If a chief gave an important ceremony, he, or one of his friends, carved a figure, perhaps that of a man, perhaps of some animal connected with the ceremony, to call to mind the ceremony. No carvings have been made within the life-time of any Bella Coola, so it is possible that they had further significance, now unknown.

When a chief wishes to summon his fellows for a meeting he does so by vi-

siting each and notifying him by a simple pressure on the foot, often unobserved even by those sitting near. The significance is well understood, and the person so called slips away unostentatiously to the well known meeting-place.

The position of chief in Bella Coola was not without its disadvantages in the old days. The Bella Coola are so jealous that anyone who succeeded in elevating himself to a position above his fellows became an object of envy. Their mythology contains many examples of the murder of a powerful chief by jealous rivals of his own village, and informants of to-day state that these records are true. One of the writer's most intelligent Indians assured him that his father had thus been slain about fifty years ago. It appears that attempts were commonly made to slay chiefs by means of sympathetic magic, and it is quite possible that such attempts, becoming known, preyed upon the minds of the victims to such an extent that death resulted.

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## S SAOK ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ SOCIETY

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ancestral
The names which chiefs desire to raise to a position of eminence are usually embodied in myths dealing with the first settlement of this earth, and which belong as has been stated to the ancestral family. In many of these myths there are, moreover, other names, each carrying with it the prerogative of performing a type of dance known as s saok. These ~~xxx~~ will be spoken of, henceforth, as s saok names. The meaning of this term is not known by the Bella Coola. S saok names, like ancestral names, are the potential property of members of the ancestral family but can only be assumed when duly validated by presents. Such an assumption follows a period of seclusion in the back-room of the house. Either men or women are eligible.
sometimes
A person can be so secluded a number of times, acquiring a new s saok name on each occasion, and as ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ presents must be distributed ~~x~~ ~~xxxx~~ every time, it follows that only the children or relatives of wealthy chiefs can be so favoured.

It is desirable to have the bestowal of a s saok name occur at a potlatch, since guests from foreign tribes are then present, and the fame of the initiate is thereby carried further afield than would be possible if only Bella Coola were in attendance. Every individual duly secluded and given a s saok name feels himself ceremonially allied to others who have had a similar experience, and they form a grouping which may be termed the s saok secret society.

The close connection between this society and chiefs is obvious from the presence of the names of each in the same ancestral myths. None the less, every chief, that is a person with duly validated ancestral name and seat, is not a s saok unless he has validated a s saok name for himself and undergone the period of seclusion. Conversely, a man may be a duly authorized member of the s saok while lacking a seat and the other marks of chieftainship. The relation ship is, however, so close that the Bella Coola think of the s saok society as a society of chiefs. S saok dances take place at potlatches and funerals, occasionally at gatherings of less importance. Difficulties arise at the death of a chief who has failed to use some of his goods for the acquisition of a s saok name. Such a case took place at the death of an important Bella Coola in the summer of 1923. Theoretically, he was ignorant of s saok rites, but after much discussion these were used on account of his importance as a numitɬ chief, an instance of the manner in which a man's personal importance overrules ceremonial dictates.

The Bella Coola believe that only some of their s saok name-prerogatives came to this earth at the beginning of time with their first ancestors, and that many more have been acquired by supernatural experiences. These were especially common among their first forbears as they ranged over this earth seeking places to settle in the beginning of time. No s saok name can be assumed casually, each must have had some supernatural origin. But the Bella Coola have few s saok origin myths, though theoretically there should be one to account

every name. The explanation appears to lie in the undoubted fact that many s nook prerogatives have been acquired comparatively recently from the Bella Bella. The writer's informants were unanimous on this point. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, why elaborate myths have are lacking, even if such were possessed by the Bella Bella. The Bella Coola possessed certain similar rites to which the Bella Bella prerogatives were grafted in the process of being grafted at the time of the coming of the white man and the consequent decay of custom, with the result that the whole situation is in a state of flux presenting great difficulties to the investigator.

S nook names are willed and inherited in the manner already described for other prerogatives. The type of dance, and the time of use will be described in the following section of this chapter.

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## THE POTLATCH

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It is unfortunate that an adequate treatment of Rank among the Bella Coola requires a description of the potlatch since this ceremony, or rather group of ceremonies, includes a number of features which the writer would have preferred to deal with at a later stage of this monograph. The writer has endeavoured to reduce this difficulty by the description, just given, of the abstract concepts of chieftainship and the s nook societies; the actual application of which is to be found in the ritual of the potlatch. Other ideas will require rather lengthy digressions from the account of the actual ritual, a method of presentation which seems preferable to the use of lengthy foot-notes, the only alternative.

### General Observations.

Guests from other tribes are sometimes invited to be present at ~~athmx~~ ceremonials other than potlatches, but this is unusual. Since the validity of such transactions as marriages, divorces, or the assumption of professional prerogatives depends on the presence of witnesses, and since the importance of such a rite depends on the number of witnesses, it follows that a man is always eager to carry out any public performance at a potlatch when he is sure of the attention of foreigners, and the consequent wider diffusion of knowledge of what he has done. The man who has called the guests is usually willing for others to perform at his potlatch, since it increases the complexity and importance of the affair. It follows that no two potlatches are alike; ~~xk~~ one will contain features entirely lacking from another. Moreover, the wealth of the donor determines how many rites he himself will ~~purfurm~~ cause to be performed. The fundamental concept of the potlatch is the inviting of guests from abroad to witness rites in connection with an ancestral myth, and especially the return of a recently deceased relative of the donor to visit in the living.

At any important potlatch the following rites are carried out, and in the following account of the ritual it will be assumed that these alone are taking place.

1. The return of a dead ancestor to visit the living.

2. The initiation of a number of young men or women into the s'aok society. This includes the validation of a name (s'aok) for each, and a period of seclusion in the back-room. The initiates may either be relatives of the donor of the potlatch, or young persons whose relatives are taking opportunity of the potlatch to carry out the rite in the presence of foreigners. Some of the initiates may already be members of the society, undergoing a further period of seclusion in order to increase their status by a further distribution of presents.

3. The payment by the wife of the donor and her family of goods to "rebuy" her from her husband. This is a legal fiction, though necessary to maintain the status of the children.

4. The strengthening of the donor's seat.

5. The strengthening, or initial establishment, of seats for a number of young relatives of the donor who may, or may not, be those whom are being initiated into the s saok society. Other youths may also be established on seats by their relatives.

If the reader bears this summary in mind it is hoped he will not become confused by the complication of rites.

The length of time occupied by a potlatch varies according to the number of rites being performed. The preliminaries, including the beginning of seclusion for s saok initiates, requires at leats several weeks, and sometimes months. There is further delay of a week or more after the arrival of the first guests as only when the last party has arrived can the actual potlatch begin. This can then be completed in two days, although if many initiates are performing their s saok dances, a longer time is required.

to the guiding spirit, the ability, given by the supreme god to the latter. By prayer, ceremonial chastity and other means, to be described later, a man may increase the powers granted to him, but if these are entirely lacking, he can never hope to rise to the position of chief.

## Preliminaries.

In describing the potlatch, it will be convenient to refer to the donor as X., and assume him to be a middle-aged member of the s'ack society, whose seat, though duly ratified, lacks importance through his previous failure to give large presents.

For a number of years X. has prospered. He has amassed quantities of skins, blankets, tools, copper ornaments, clothing, canoes, baskets, dentalium shell, slaves, and other valuables. He is especially rich in caribou skins, used for foot covering, and goat skins, so treasured for their wool.(1). He and his wife have laid up abundant food, and, most important of all, his wife's family is wealthy.

(1). Formerly, when goat-skin blankets were highly valued, goats were never shot for fear of the blood staining the wool. Instead, they were cornered by dogs, and choked to death in nooses. For presentation, each skin was laid out on the floor and then cut into longitudinal strips, two, three or four fingers wide.